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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 007361

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SUBJECT: U/S BURNS MEETS WITH SENIOR GOC OFFICIALS AND
FORMER MINDEF

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood, Reasons: 1.4 B & D.

1. (U) July 26, 2005, 8:00-10:30 pm, Ambassador's Residence,
Bogota.

2. (U) Participants:

U.S.

3. R. Nicholas Burns, U/S for Political Affairs

Ambassador William B. Wood

DCM Milton K. Drucker

Jeffrey DeLaurentis, Political Counselor

Cynthia Echeverria, P Special Assistant

Brian Walch, POL, notetaker

Colombia

Jorge Humberto Botero, Commerce Minister

Juan Lozano, Presidential Counselor

Jaime Bermudez, Presidential Communications Director

Jorge Alberto Uribe, former Minister of Defense.

3. (C) Summary: U/S Burns and Ambassador met over dinner on July 26 with Commerce Minister Jorge Humberto Botero, Presidential Counselor Juan Lozano, Presidential Communications Director Jaime Bermudez, and former Defense Minister Jorge Alberto Uribe. U/S Burns stressed the importance of progress on human rights and timely and transparent implementation of the demobilization law. He also noted the Secretary's keen interest in setting a positive agenda with democratic nations in Latin America. The GOC officials and ex-Minister Uribe expressed concern over Venezuelan President Chavez, including the GOV's recent arms purchases and potential illegal channeling of money to Colombian political campaigns. Botero expressed concern over the delay and the "lack of content" in USTR's most recent reply to Colombian concerns on agriculture in the FTA context. With the apparent exception of Botero, all were guardedly optimistic about the prospects for a favorable Constitutional Court ruling on Presidential reelection. End Summary.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOBILIZATION LAW

4. (C) Ambassador hosted a dinner for U/S Burns on July 26 with Commerce Minister Jorge Humberto Botero, Presidential Counselor Juan Lozano, Presidential Communications Director Jaime Bermudez, and former Defense Minister Jorge Alberto Uribe. U/S Burns noted the close relationship of Colombia and the U.S. He added that the certification of Colombia's human rights record had been held up pending his report to the Secretary after this trip. U/S Burns explained Washington's--USG, Congress, and NGOs--keen interest in progress on key human rights issues, and in particular the cases of San Jose de Apartado, Mapiripan, and Arauca. He stated that for many members of Congress, progress on those cases was key as Congress was considering support for a successor to Plan Colombia. Regarding the demobilization law (aka Justice and Peace), U/S Burns noted that the GOC had gotten off to a slow start in explaining it to relevant Washington actors. He stressed that timely, transparent, and rigorous implementation was key. Uribe passionately explained the need for a balance between peace and justice/truth, citing his own personal example of the paramilitaries' and guerrillas' kidnapping 17 members of his extended family, including his son. Uribe stated his personal desire for revenge against those who had been involved in the kidnapping of his son, but continued that revenge was not in the best interest of the nation. U/S Burns suggested Colombia be more pro-active in explaining publicly the complex and compelling public security and humanitarian situation it has faced for five decades, in an effort to bring more actors around to its cause.

5. (C) In discussing the demobilization law, the Colombians explained their view that the law was the best politically possible compromise between justice and peace. The demobilization of paramilitaries was urgent, but peace would not be achieved without incentives to paramilitaries to

demobilize their troops. The Colombians explained the new law would not pardon paramilitaries and should apply to the FARC and ELN. Ex-Minister Uribe complained the law was being judged by people who lived far from Colombia. They did not have an accurate understanding of the nature and background of Colombia's conflict. U/S Burns urged prompt, vigorous application of the law. He also insisted that paramilitary leaders must be prosecuted and jailed for their crimes.

CHAVEZ A PROBLEM

16. (C) U/S Burns told the group that Secretary Rice had returned from her March visit to Latin America and meeting with President Uribe energized to improve U.S. relations with Latin America. She had welcomed President Uribe's observations on the region, in particular the need to deal constructively with responsible center-left legitimate democracies in the region. U/S Burns solicited the group's views on Venezuelan President Chavez. Uribe expressed concern over Russian and Spanish arms sales--in particular rifles--to Venezuela. He asked rhetorically why Venezuela needed the arms and predicted that one day they would threaten Colombia. U/S Burns recounted his recent discussions with Spanish officials on the subject, lamenting that the Spanish appeared to lack a strategic rationale for having made the sales. U/S Burns noted the only argument seemed to be that the manufacture of the weapons generated employment and this was an insufficient justification. Botero felt that Brazilian President Lula was uncomfortable with Chavez's attempts to overplay their close relations. Botero cited the Andean Community of Nations Summit as an example of Chavez's bizarre behavior: Chavez justified his socialist views by claiming that Christ was a socialist, but Judas was a capitalist. Bermudez believed Chavez was beginning to channel money to leftist political campaigns in Colombia in advance of 2006 Congressional and Presidential elections. All concurred that Chavez's control of institutions was total, and that his mental stability is in doubt.

MORE THAN JUST PUBLIC SECURITY

17. (C) Bermudez outlined "five principles" guiding the GOC's approach, and suggested they could be an example for other nations in the hemisphere: improved public security, more transparent institutions, enhanced individual liberties, stronger social cohesion, and a more level playing field for political participation (using the term "guarantees," or "garantias" in Spanish). Lozano qualified Uribe Administration economic policies as pro-growth, with an eye toward bringing economic opportunity to the lower classes, which would reduce incentives to traffic narcotics and/or enter illegal armed groups (IAGs). In this context, he stressed the large increase in adolescents and young adults trained in technical vocations -- some 2.9 million in 2004 alone. Botero highlighted expansion of micro-credit programs.

CONCERN OVER FTA NEGOTIATIONS

18. (C) Botero complained about USTR's written response to Colombian agricultural concerns in the context of FTA negotiations. He lamented that after taking five weeks to respond, the USTR paper did not address all of Colombia's questions, and arrived only a week before the Crawford meeting between Presidents Bush and Uribe.

REELECTION STILL A QUESTION MARK

19. (C) In discussing the pending Constitutional Court ruling on Presidential reelection, Bermudez and Lozano were the most confident, expecting the Court to allow reelection to stand. Uribe and Botero were more guarded, however, suggesting that a hybrid decision was possible, namely allowing reelection but only in a non-consecutive term fashion. Uribe suggested the issue was like the flip of a coin, indicating anything was possible with the polemic and activist Court.

110. (U) U/S Burns has cleared this cable.
DRUCKER